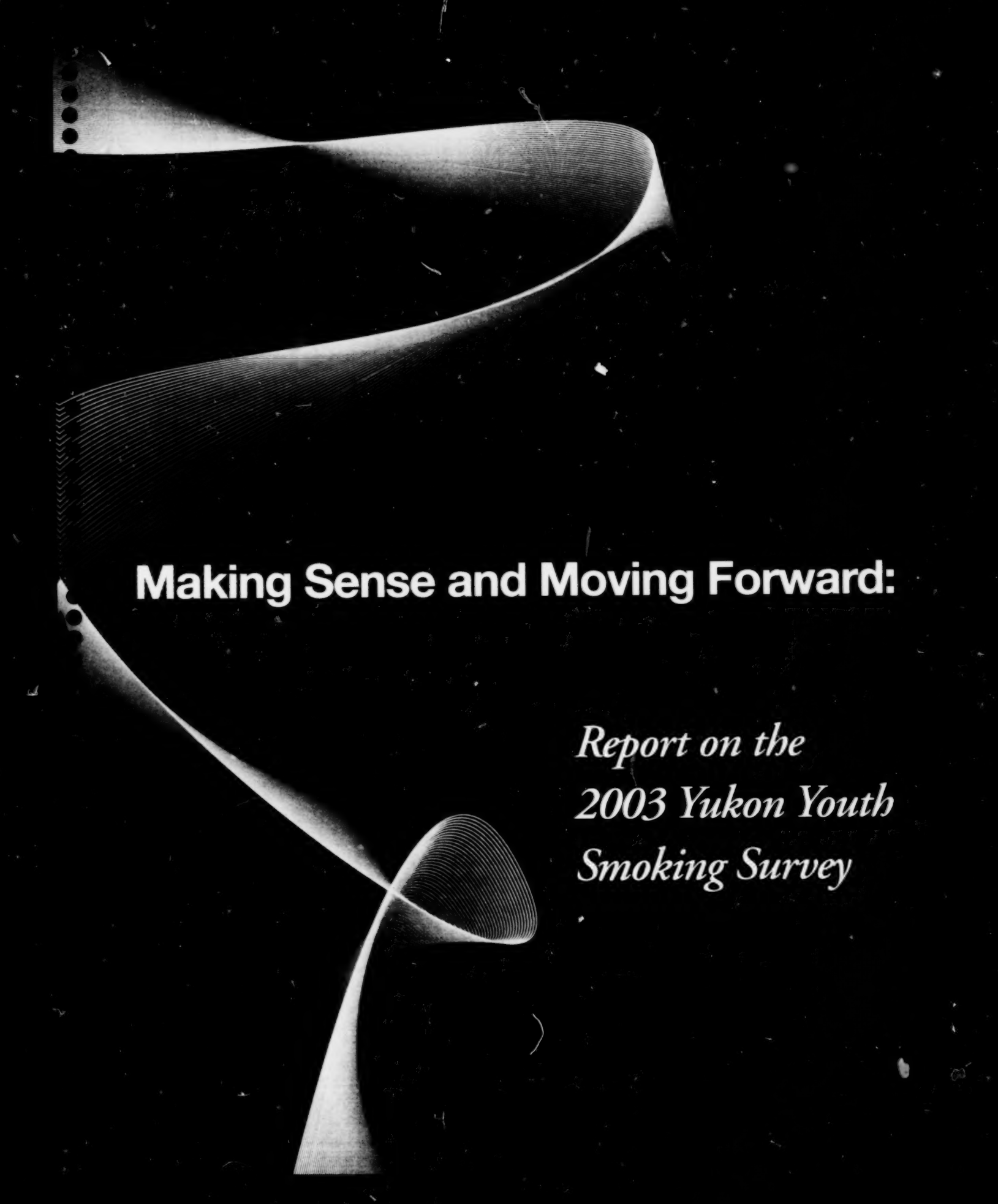


Making Sense and Moving Forward:

Report on the 2003 Yukon Youth Smoking Survey

Acknowledgements

The Yukon Youth Smoking Survey was a large undertaking and we have many people to thank. First, we would like to thank the students who participated in our survey. We appreciate not only the time they took to complete the surveys, but also the observations, experiences and insights they willingly shared with us.

We would also like to thank the officials in the Department of Education, school principals, and teachers for making it possible for us to conduct our survey in Yukon schools.

To the staff of the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, we owe our gratitude for their help from the start to the finish of this project, including preparing and conducting the survey, training group facilitators, compiling the results, providing constructive feedback on our analysis, and reviewing an earlier draft of this report.

Finally, we wish to thank Health Canada for recognizing the importance of learning more about the smoking behaviours and attitudes of Northern youth by funding the Yukon Youth Smoking Survey.

Note to the Reader

As you read this report, it is important to keep in mind what surveys can and cannot tell us about why people make certain choices or behave in certain ways. Surveys can identify that one factor may be ***related*** to another. For example, we have found that youth who smoke are more likely to spend three or more hours per day watching television. That is, there is a relationship between smoking and time spent watching TV. Surveys cannot, however, identify what ***causes*** people to make certain decisions or behave in certain ways. To continue with the example above, we could not conclude that watching TV causes youth to smoke although it is plausible that television shows and advertisements do exert some influence. Although it appears implausible, it could be the smoking causes TV watching. There is also the possibility that a third factor leads a young person to both watch more television and smoke. For example, youth may alleviate boredom in many ways, including watching television and smoking. In this report, we will be looking at factors that distinguish youth who smoke from youth who do not smoke and where possible we will discuss the implications for assisting youth in remaining or becoming smoke-free.

Chapter 1: Why and how we surveyed Yukon youth

106-01297/

Our Goals

Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death and illness in Canada, and has been associated with a variety of cancers, respiratory illnesses, heart disease, and stroke. The nicotine found in tobacco makes it highly addictive. The majority of people who smoke find it very difficult to quit,[1] and most people who smoke daily as teenagers will become daily smokers as adults.[2] 85% of current adult smokers had their first cigarette by the age of 18.[3]

When it comes to smoking, prevention is the key. If we can help youth resist the temptation to take up smoking, the likelihood that they will remain tobacco-free as adults is much greater. Anything we can do to better understand who is smoking, and why, will help us design better prevention strategies. By surveying youth about smoking, we can form a clearer picture of when they first experiment with smoking, the factors that may contribute to their decision to start, and the factors that may maintain their smoking. This "big picture" can be used to take action to discourage youth from starting to smoke, and assist those who smoke to become smoke-free. For example, if we know the age at which youth are tempted to try their first cigarette, then we know when to start prevention programs. Knowing the attitudes and beliefs of youth who decide to smoke can help us develop prevention materials and programs which speak to youth's understanding and concerns, and support a decision to remain or become smoke-free.

We hope that by making our findings available to students, teachers, youth workers, parents and others, we will stimulate dialogue, discussion and debate, and encourage effective action to reduce tobacco use among youth.

Surveying Yukon youth

Historically, there have been gaps in our knowledge of smoking among Yukon youth. Our small population and the great distances between communities have made it both difficult and costly to include the Territories in national youth smoking surveys (e.g., the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey and the National Youth Smoking Survey) in any meaningful way. For these reasons, it was felt that specific surveys for each territory were necessary to provide meaningful information.

The factors that promote or discourage tobacco use among Yukon youth may or may not be similar to those that influence youth smoking in other parts of Canada. The only way to know is to survey Yukon youth directly. We decided to adapt the National Youth Smoking Survey, conducted in 2002 by Health Canada, for use in the Yukon. The intent of the Yukon Youth Smoking Survey (YYSS) was to survey all Yukon students in Grades 5 through 12 to provide us with a better understanding of the factors that influence Yukon youth to take up or avoid tobacco use.

1. US Department of Health and Human Services. Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services. Office on Smoking and Health, 1994.
2. Stephens, T., and Morins, M. (eds.) Health Canada. Youth Smoking Survey. Cycle 4, 1994 Technical Report. Ottawa. 1996. Minister of Supply and Services. #49-98/1-1994E1, p.63.
3. Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS), 2000

How the survey was conducted

Three teams of two people surveyed students in all Yukon schools. Each team included an experienced interviewer from the Yukon Bureau of Statistics and an assistant between the ages of 19 and 24. These young adults received training on tobacco use and control, survey methods, and techniques to facilitate group discussion among students prior to beginning the research.

Yukon students completed the surveys during regular school hours. In addition to completing the written survey, we wanted to provide students with an opportunity to discuss some aspect of smoking that may be of interest to them, such as the reasons youth do or do not start smoking, the impact of second-hand smoke, or the tobacco industry. In this way, our methodology differed from that used by Health Canada. We felt it was important to actively engage youth in dialogue and debate to stimulate interest and prompt critical thinking about smoking among youth. More often than not, these discussions provided interesting and helpful insights into what Yukon youth think about smoking. Some of these insights are presented in this report where they illuminate or expand upon what the survey data show.

Overall, 161 classrooms were surveyed representing every Yukon community. Not all students were available to participate on the days that the survey was conducted in their school and a small number of students declined the opportunity to participate. Seventy-seven per cent (77%) of Yukon students participated in the survey. Although we fell short of our goal to survey all Yukon youth, we believe that our sample is representative of Yukon youth as a whole. We are confident the findings presented in this report paint an accurate picture of smoking behaviour and attitudes among Yukon students.

Chapter 2: Smoking among Yukon youth

It's a proven fact that humans are the only creature(s) that go against their survival instincts. Every other creature, if they know it will hurt them or kill them, they won't do it.

Grade 11/12 student

There are many different ways of describing a person's experience with smoking. Before we go further, it's important to explain the terms that we will be using throughout this report.[4]

A person who has **never smoked** has never tried smoking a cigarette, not even a few puffs. We also use the term **non-smoker** to describe this person.

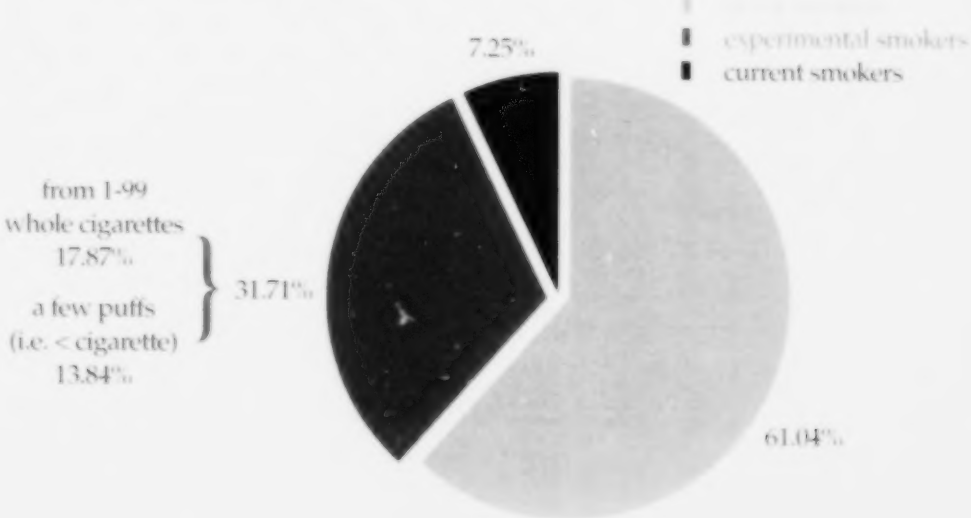
An **experimental smoker** has smoked anywhere from a few puffs to 99 whole cigarettes.

A **current smoker** has smoked at least 100 cigarettes over the course of his or her lifetime, and has had at least one cigarette in the past 30 days.

The good news

The majority of Yukon youth in Grades 5 to 12 do not smoke. In fact, approximately 61% have never smoked – they have not tried even a few puffs of a cigarette. About one-third (32%) of the students surveyed are experimental smokers. Among experimental smokers, there are roughly equal numbers of students who have smoked only a few puffs and students who have smoked anywhere from one to 99 whole cigarettes. Finally, just over 7% of the students are current smokers. These are students who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and were still smoking at the time of the survey.

Graph 2.1 – **Overall smoking among Yukon youth**



The breakdown

The older a student is, the more likely he or she is to have tried smoking or become a regular smoker. For example, most students in Grades 5-7 have never smoked and there are almost no current smokers. In contrast, almost two-thirds of students in Grades 11 and 12 have tried smoking or currently smoke. From Grade 5 to Grade 12, the percentage of students who have never smoked decreases, and the percentages of students who are experimental and current smokers increase.

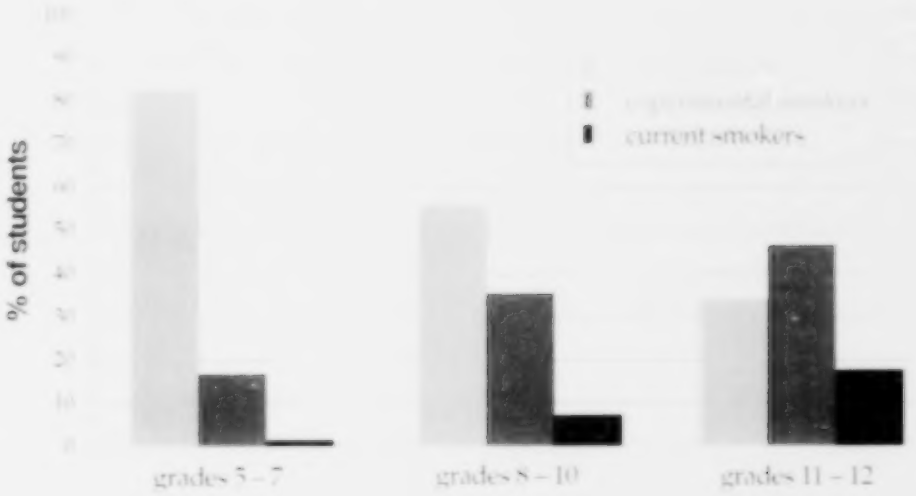
4. The term **former smoker** is used to refer to someone who has smoked at least 100 cigarettes in his/her lifetime and has not smoked at all during the past 30 days. Because there are so few former smokers found among those surveyed for the YYSS, this category of smoking status is not used in this report.

Most people I know that smoke, just hate it and they tell people not even to start. Like people that have just smoked for a week, they will ask them what the hell they are doing. Tell them not even to start smoking.

Grade 11 student

What percentage of students smoke within each grade level?

Graph 2.2 – Smoking behaviour by grade

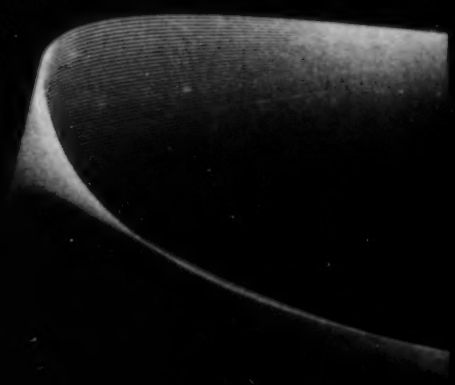


The majority of students (83%) in Grades 5-7 (roughly 10-12 year olds) have never smoked, not even a few puffs. Of the remaining students, 17% are experimental smokers, and less than 1% are current smokers.

Although a slim majority (36%) of Grades 8-10 students (roughly 13–15 year olds) have never smoked, the percentage of experimental smokers doubles (36% versus 17%). The percentage of students who are current smokers, while low, has climbed to 7%.

By Grades 11-12, students (roughly 16-19 year olds) who have tried smoking outnumber those who have never tried cigarettes by a ratio of two to one. Only one-third of students have never tried smoking. Forty-eight per cent (48%) of students are experimental smokers and 18% of students are current smokers. This is more than twice the percentage of current smokers in Grades 8-10.

These findings demonstrate that youth's experience with cigarettes changes significantly across the grades. What follows is a more in-depth look at smoking among students in each grade grouping. Factors which are associated with, or may influence, smoking are considered including gender, place of residence, reading for fun, TV watching, level of physical activity, engagement in positive activity, self-esteem, desired weight, peer influence, and beliefs about future smoking behavior.



Key findings – Overall smoking among Yukon youth

- Most Yukon youth do not smoke.
- The percentage of students who experiment with smoking, or currently smoke, increases with age.
- Experimenting with cigarettes doubles from Grades 5-7 to Grades 8-10.
- The percentage of current smokers doubles from Grades 8-10 to Grades 11-12.
- By Grades 11-12, one in five students is a current smoker.

Chapter 3: The beginning of experimenting

Life is already too short.

Grade 5 student's
reason for not smoking

The vast majority of youth (83%) in Grades 5, 6 and 7 are non-smokers, that is, they have never even tried a few puffs of a cigarette. Seventeen per cent (17%) of students are experimenting with cigarettes but are not yet current smokers.

Because the number of current smokers in these grade levels is too small (less than 1%) to draw any conclusions, this chapter will look only at non-smokers and experimental smokers (i.e., students who have smoked anywhere from a few puffs to 99 whole cigarettes). The profile that follows will look at ways in which students who have never tried smoking are similar to, and different from, students who are experimenting with tobacco in Grades 5-7.

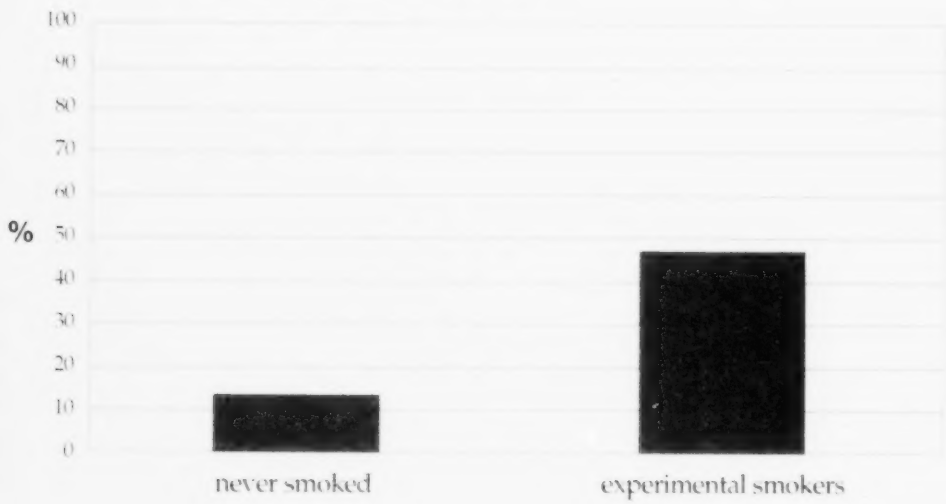
How do male and females compare?

There is no difference between males and females in these grades when it comes to smoking. For both genders, the vast majority of students (83%) have never tried smoking, and for each gender, most of the students who have tried smoking are experimental, not current, smokers.

What about peer groups?

Among students in Grades 5-7, experimental smokers are much more likely than non-smokers to have at least one close friend who smokes.

Graph 3.1 – **Percentage of Grade 5-7 students who have at least one close friend who smokes**



Monkey see, monkey do. If someone sees you smoking, then they'll take it up.

Grade 5 student

If you try quitting, then people will think you are a wuss and stuff. And, they'll be like, "you can't hang around with us anymore, we're the smoking group."

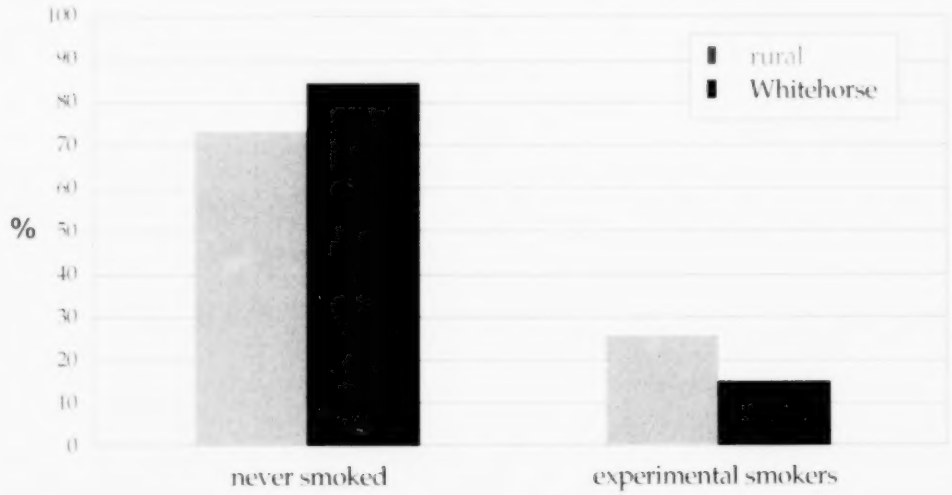
Grade 6 student

Peer influence may play a role in the decision to experiment with cigarettes. Having a close friend who smokes may provide opportunity and encouragement to try smoking as well as normalize smoking.

How do students in Whitehorse compare with their peers in rural Yukon?

Although no gender differences are found in these grades, Grade 5-7 students living in rural Yukon are almost twice as likely to experiment with cigarettes than Whitehorse youth.

Graph 3.2 – **Smoking among Grade 5-7 students living in rural Yukon and Whitehorse**



Are there differences in how non-smokers and experimenters spend their time?

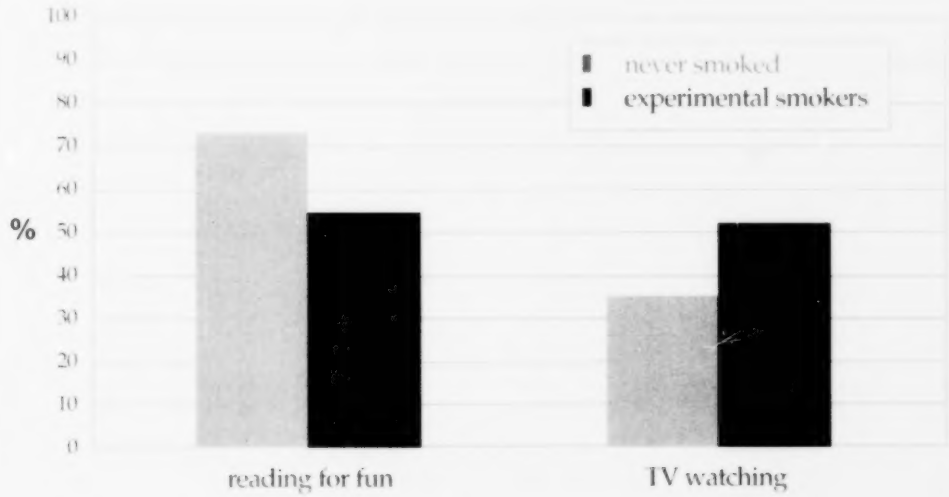
This survey examined how youth spend time outside of school. Four categories of activities were examined: physical activity, other positive activities, reading and TV watching.

Experimental smokers in Grades 5-7 are as physically active as their non-smoking peers. Approximately 58% of Grade 5-7 students participate in some form of physical activity (e.g., biking, skateboarding, swimming, baseball, hockey) four or more times per week.

Non-smokers are more likely to be involved, however, in other positive activities (e.g., groups, clubs, lessons, or hobbies). Seventy-two per cent (72%) of non-smokers and 63.5 per cent of experimental smokers in Grades 5-7 engage in this kind of activity one to three times per week.

Reading for pleasure is also more common among Grade 5-7 students who have never smoked than it is among students who have experimented with smoking (73% versus 54%)

Graph 3.3 – **Percentage of Grades 5-7 students who read and watch TV**



Finally, experimental smokers are more likely to watch television for three or more hours per day than are their non-smoking peers (52% versus 36%)

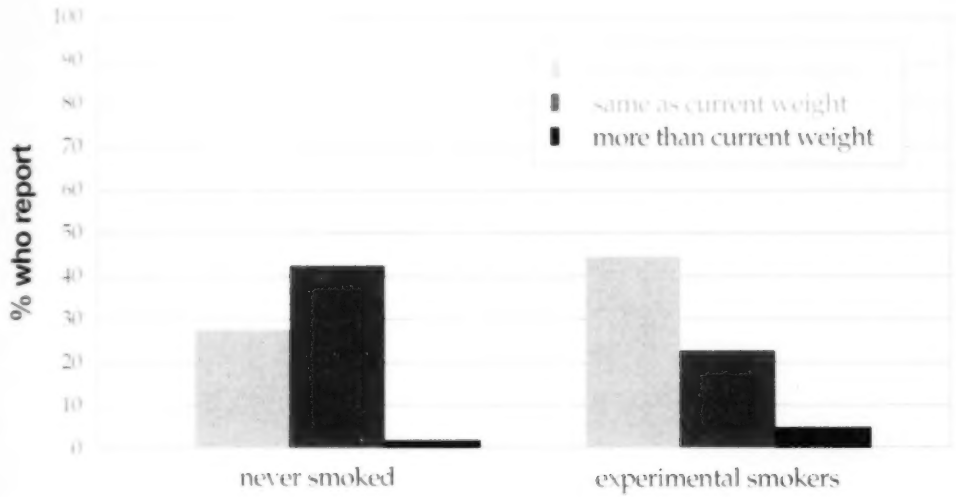
Are there differences in how non-smokers and experimental smokers feel about themselves?

Although the majority of students in these grades (67%) feel good about themselves, there are differences in how students who do and do not experiment with smoking in Grades 5-7 feel about themselves. Seventy-two per cent (72%) of non-smokers, versus 59% of experimental smokers, endorse the statement, "I like the way I am". There is little difference, however, in how experimental smokers and non-smokers respond to the statement, "I like the way I look." Sixty-eight per cent (68%) of non-smokers and 62% of experimental smokers endorse this statement.

Many students in Grades 5-7 are dissatisfied with their current weight, and those who are dissatisfied report a desire to weigh less. Because males and females typically have different experiences, expectations, and attitudes towards their bodies, the data on satisfaction with body image are presented separately for the two genders.

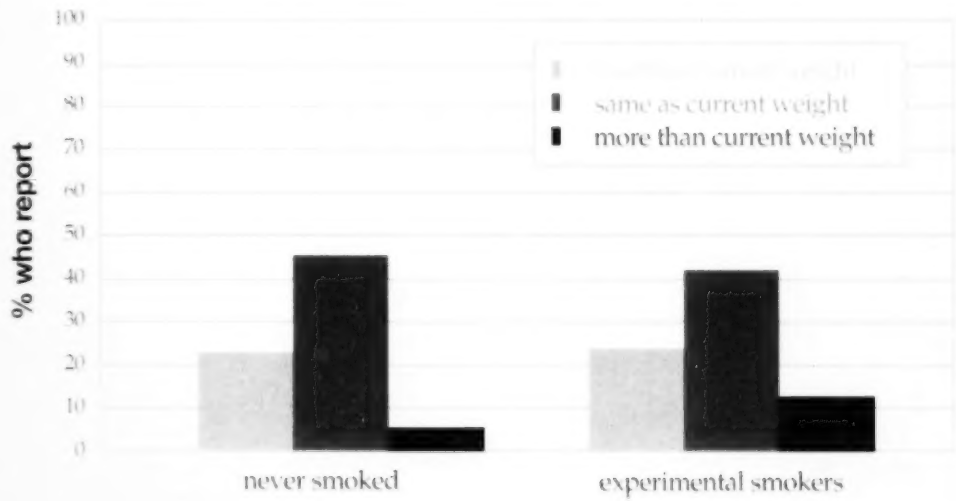
Non-smoking females are almost twice as likely to report being satisfied with their current weight than are females who experiment with smoking (43% versus 23%).

Graph 3.4 – **Desired weight of Grade 5-7 females**



A different pattern is seen for males. Although many males are dissatisfied with their current weight, experimental smokers are not more dissatisfied with their weight than are their peers who have never smoked.

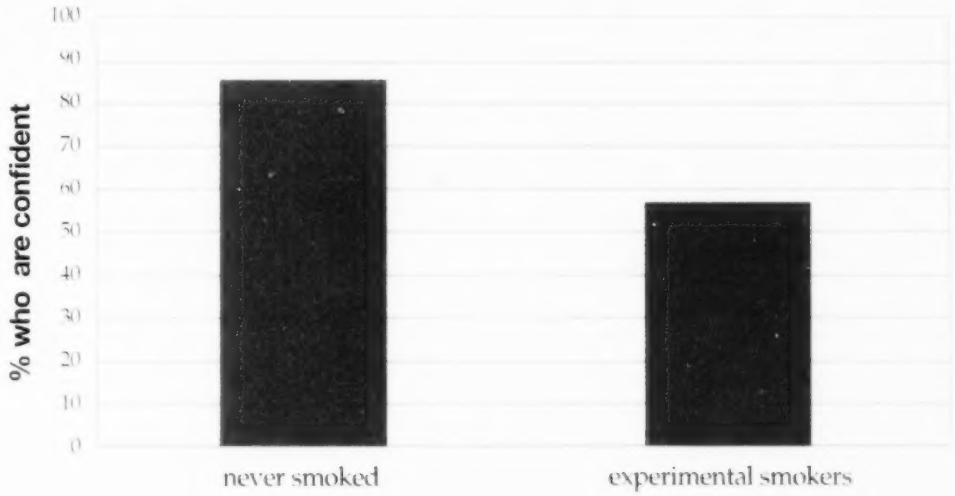
Graph 3.5 – **Desired weight of Grade 5-7 males**



What does the future hold?

Even at this age, experimental smokers are more likely to predict that they will be smoking next year than are non-smokers. Whereas most non-smokers believe they will remain smoke-free, only slightly more than one-half of experimental smokers are confident that they will no longer be smoking in a year's time.

Graph 3.6 – **Confidence of being a non-smoker next year**



Key findings – Grades 5-7

- The vast majority of Grade 5-7 students have never tried even a few puffs of a cigarette.
- Youth in Grades 5,6 and 7 who live in rural communities are more likely to experiment with smoking than their peers living in Whitehorse.
- Youth who experiment with tobacco at this stage of life read less, watch more television and are less involved in positive activities in their communities than are their peers who do not experiment with tobacco.
- Youth who experiment with smoking are less likely to be satisfied with "the way they are" than are non-smokers.
- Dissatisfaction with weight is particularly high among females who experiment with smoking.

Chapter 4: The transition years

Other people do it and they want to be like them.

Grade 9 student
on why youth start smoking

When it comes to smoking, something important is happening in Grades 8, 9 and 10. Both the survey results and comments made by youth in the group discussions lead us to believe that these years are critical in shaping a young person's path from being a non-smoker to being an experimental or current smoker. Although more than 50% of students in these grades continue to avoid tobacco, the percentage of students who experiment with tobacco doubles from 17% to 36%, and the percentage of current smokers jumps from less than 1% to 7% when compared to Grades 5-7.

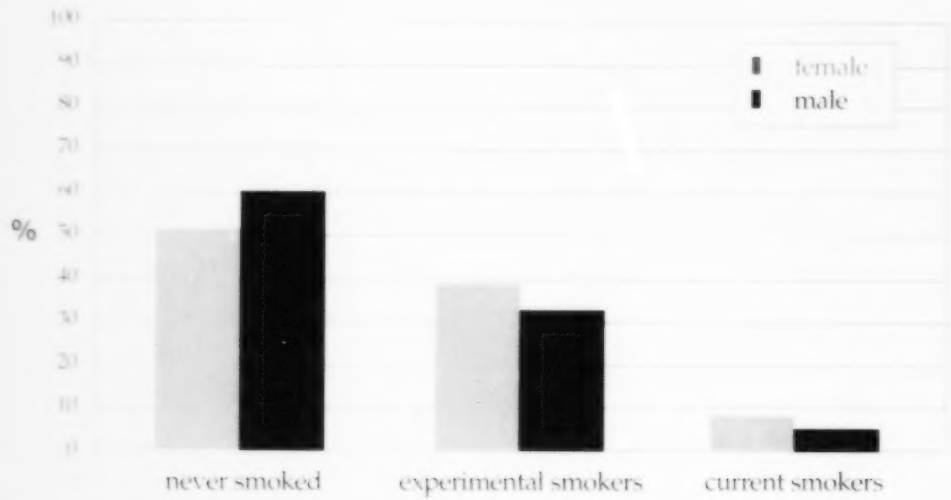
In this chapter, we will look more closely at smokers and non-smokers and the factors that may influence, or be related to, smoking behaviour in Grades 8-10.

Are smoking rates comparable among males and females?

Gender differences in smoking behaviour emerge in Grades 8-10 with higher rates of smoking among females than males.

Females in this age group appear to be further along the path when it comes to smoking than males. When experimental and current smokers are combined, 48.5% of females compared to 39.2% of males are using tobacco.

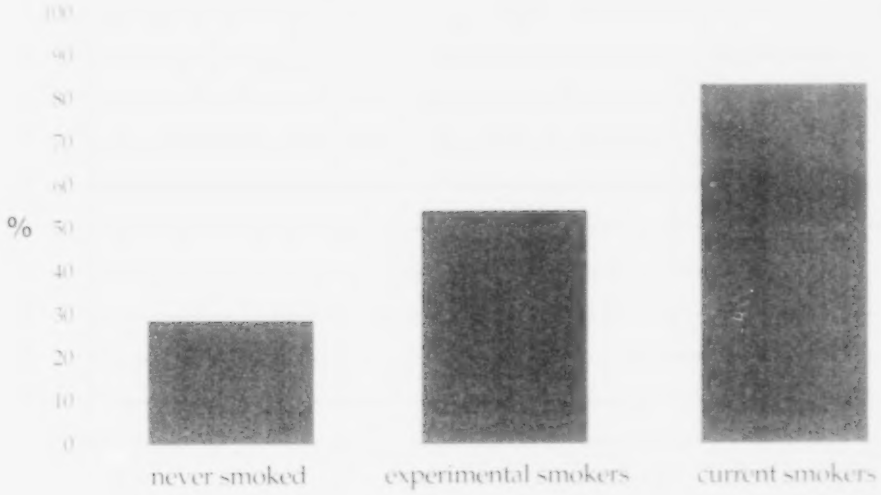
Graph 4.1 – **Smoking among males and females in Grades 8-10**



Do peer groups matter?

Current smokers are far more likely to have at least one close friend who smokes than are experimental smokers (84% versus 57%). Experimental smokers, in turn, are more likely than non-smokers to have at least one close friend who smokes (57% versus 29%). These results suggest that young smokers are more likely to associate with people who also smoke, and this tendency is most pronounced among current smokers.

Graph 4.2 – **Percentage of students who count at least one smoker among their close friends**



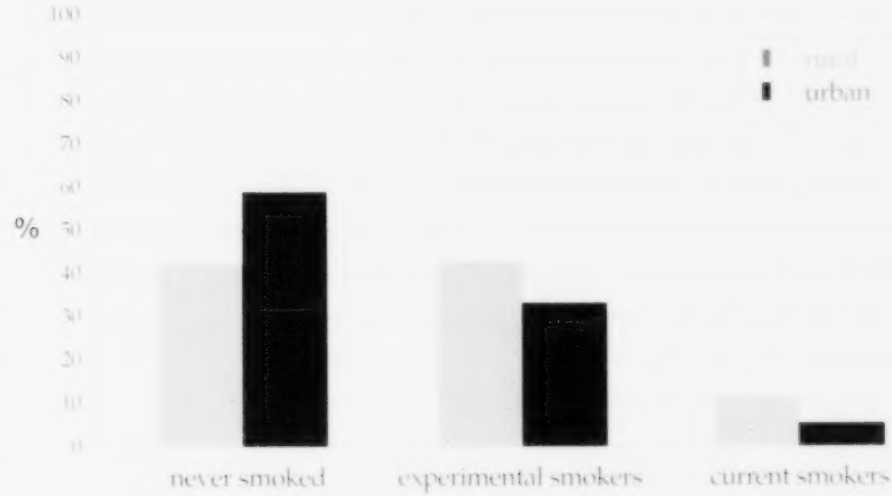
If you hang around somebody that smokes, there is a very high chance that you are going to smoke as well.

Grade 7 student

How does smoking compare in rural Yukon and Whitehorse?

Smoking rates continue to be higher among rural Yukon students in Grades 8-10 than among Whitehorse students. Forty-five per cent (45%) of rural youth, versus 34% of Whitehorse youth, are experimental smokers. The rate of current smokers in rural communities is almost twice as high as in Whitehorse (11.5% versus 6%).

Graph 4.3 – **Smoking rates in Whitehorse and rural Yukon**



How do students in these grades spend their time?

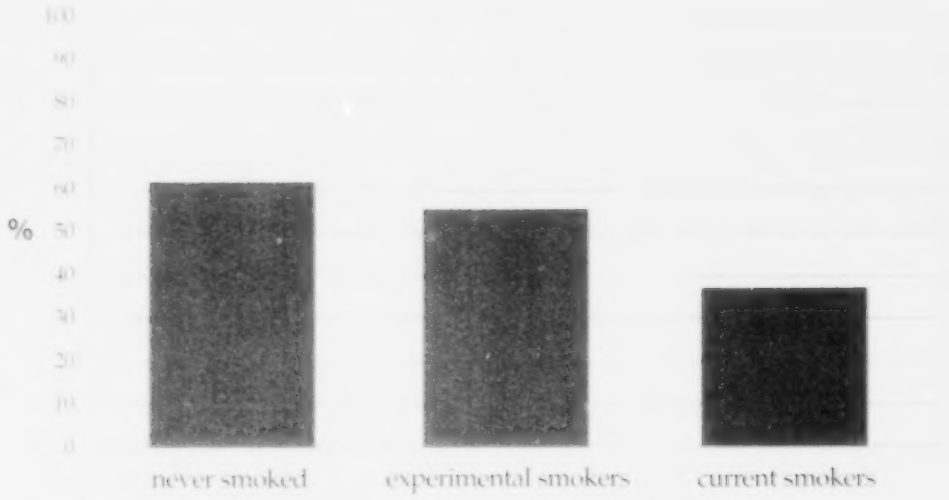
Have activities so people won't get bored.

Rural student on ***how*** *to reduce smoking* ***in*** *her community*

Differences in physical activity levels among smokers and non-smokers emerge in Grades 8-10 with current smokers being far less active than either experimental smokers or non-smokers. While physical activity levels are similar in the latter two groups (62% and 57%, respectively), the percentage of current smokers who are physically active four or more times per week is only 37%.

A similar, but less dramatic, trend is found when it comes to participating in other positive activities such as clubs, hobbies, or community groups. Whereas 69.5% of non-smokers engage in these activities one to three times per week, only 57.3% of current smokers in Grades 8-10 do so. Experimental smokers lie in between, with 63% engaging in positive activities.

Graph 4.4 – **Physical activity rates among non-smokers, experimental smokers and current smokers in Grades 8-10**



It's all about ***the*** *entertainment.*

Grade 10 student on why people smoke

Reading for fun is more common among Grade 8-10 students who have never smoked (59%) than it is among both experimental and current smokers (44% and 47%, respectively).

Current smokers watch more television than do both non-smokers and experimental smokers. Almost half of current smokers in this grade (48%) watch three or more hours of television per day compared to 36% of experimental smokers and 37% of students who have never smoked.

Are there differences in how non-smokers and smokers feel about themselves?

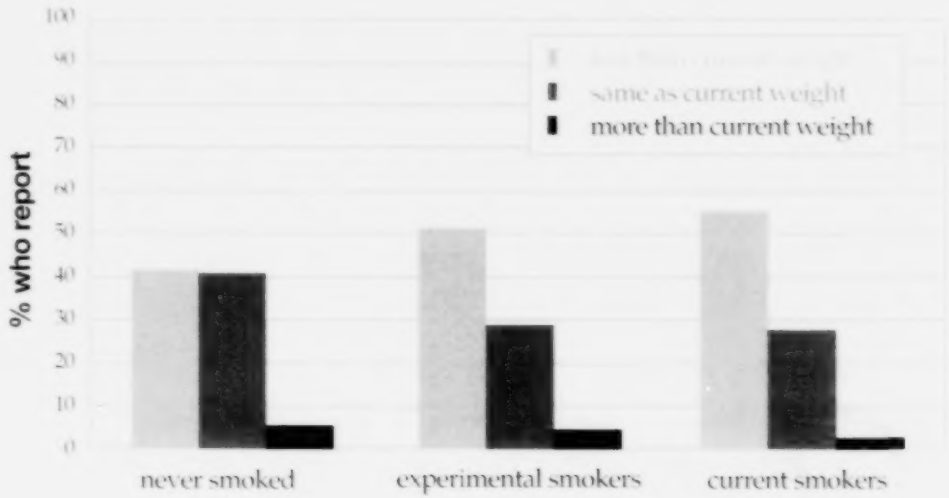
Overall, 70% of students in Grades 8-10 "like the way they are." Again, there are differences in self-satisfaction between smokers and non-smokers. Three-quarters of non-smokers (76%) approve of the way they are compared to about two-thirds of experimental and current smokers (63% and 67% respectively).

A smaller percentage of students report that they "like the way they look" but this does not appear to be more of a problem for smokers than non-smokers. Sixty-three per cent (63%) of students who have never smoked endorsed the statement "I like the way I look" versus 55% of experimental smokers and 59% of current smokers.

Less than half of students in Grades 8-10 are satisfied with their current weight. Non-smokers (46%) and experimental smokers (40%) are more likely to be satisfied with their weight than are current smokers (28%).

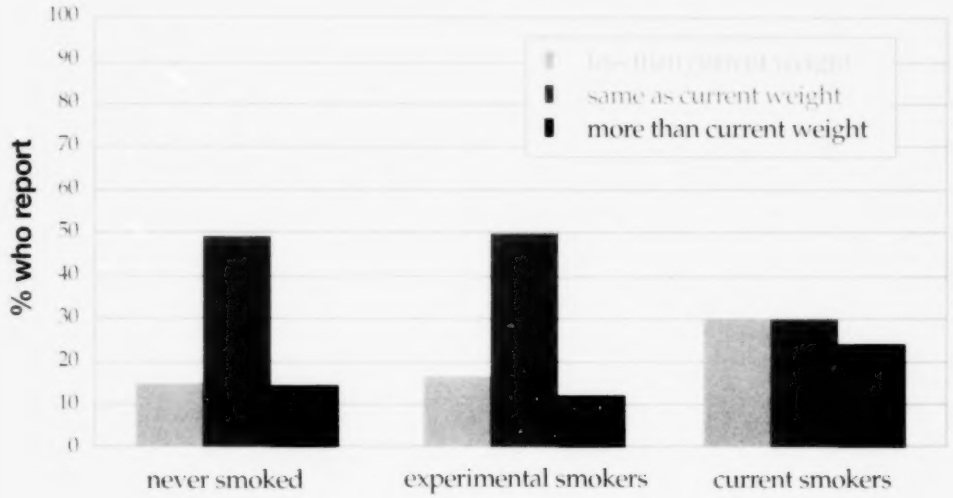
Breaking down body image satisfaction by gender leads to a different pattern of results for males and females. Again, although many students in grades 8-10 are dissatisfied with their weight, this dissatisfaction is more pronounced among females than males. Most females who are dissatisfied with their weight want to weigh less than they do now. Females who are either current smokers or experimental smokers (28% and 29%, respectively) are less likely to be satisfied with their current weight than are their peers who have never smoked (40%).

Graph 4.5 – **Desired weight of Grade 8-10 females by smoking behaviour**



Weight preferences are not as defined for males; that is, of those who are dissatisfied with their current weight, some would like to weigh less than they do now but others would like to weigh more. For males in Grades 8-10, just under one-third of current smokers are satisfied with their weight versus 50 per cent of experimental smokers or non-smokers

Graph 4.6 – **Desired weight of Grade 8-10 males by smoking behaviour**



What does the future hold?

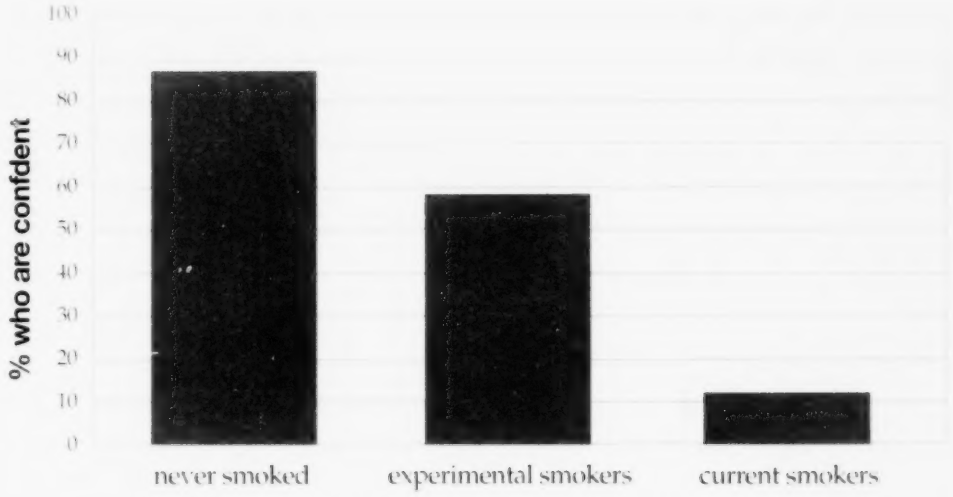
When asked whether they thought they would be smoking in one year's time, non-smokers in Grades 8-10 were more likely to say 'no' than smokers. Eighty-nine per cent (89%) of non-smokers were confident that they would remain smoke-free. Many experimental and current smokers doubt whether they will become smoke-free by next year. Least confident were current smokers. Only 12% of current smokers thought they would be smoke-free (i.e., break the habit) by next year.

Unfortunately, the survey cannot tell us why most current smokers believe they will still be smoking next year. It is possible they already appreciate the addictive properties of nicotine, and the behavioural, psychological and social dimensions of smoking that make it difficult to break the habit.

It's hard to quit.

Grade 10 student on why people continue smoking

Graph 4.7 – **Confidence among Grade 8-10 students in being or becoming smoke-free in one year's time**



Key findings – Grades 8-10

- A gender difference emerges in these years. Females are more likely to experiment with smoking than are males.
- Smoking rates continue to be higher in rural Yukon than in Whitehorse.
- Current smokers are least active, least likely to engage in positive leisure and recreational activities, least likely to read for pleasure, and most likely to spend long hours watching TV compared to non-smokers.
- Students who smoke view themselves less positively than non-smokers.
- The association between weight dissatisfaction and smoking is stronger for females than for males.

Chapter 5: Graduating to regular smoking

I think it doesn't hit you right away when you are young and smoking, but once you're smoking for a few years since you were 15 or 16 and when you hit your 20's, that's when you start feeling it.

Grade 11 student
on why youth continue to smoke

It is not surprising that the percentage of students who are either experimental or current smokers is highest in Grades 11-12. Those who have at least tried smoking outnumber those who have never puffed by a ratio of 2:1. That is, only one-third of senior students have never smoked tobacco. The percentage of Grade 11-12 students who experiment with smoking (48%) and the percentage of current smokers (18%) are higher than in Grades 8-10, suggesting that students may be "graduating" from non-smoking to smoking, and from experimental to more regular use. In this chapter, we will see that some of the factors that distinguished smokers from non-smokers in younger grades no longer do so.

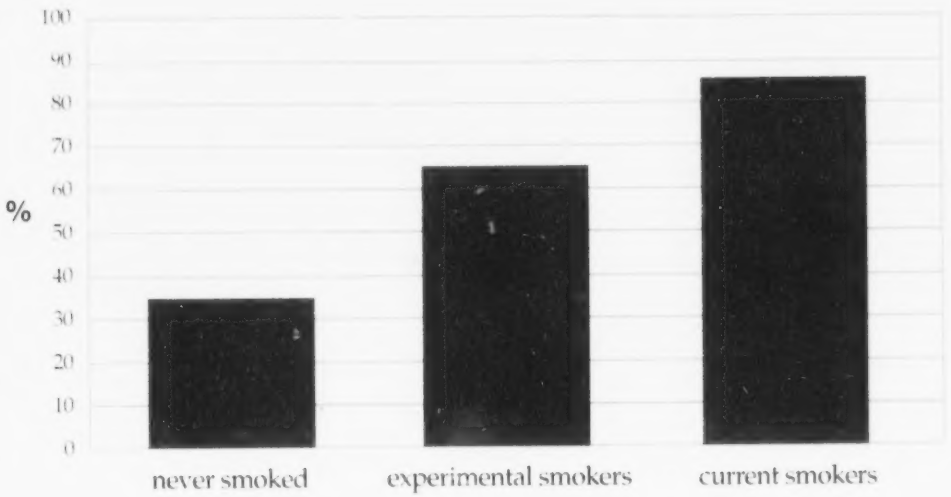
How does smoking among males and females compare?

The gender difference that emerged in Grades 8-10 disappears by Grades 11-12. There are no differences in the percentages of males and females who are non-smokers, experimental smokers, or regular current smokers. One out of five males and one out of five females are current smokers.

Do smokers associate with other smokers?

In Grades 11-12, as in younger grades, smokers are far more likely than non-smokers to have at least one close friend who smokes. Whereas 85% of current smokers have a close friendship with a smoker, only 36% of non-smokers do.

Graph 5.1 – **Percentage of students who have a close friendship with at least one smoker**



Their friends are smoking so they just keep smoking and it's something to do.

Grade 11 student

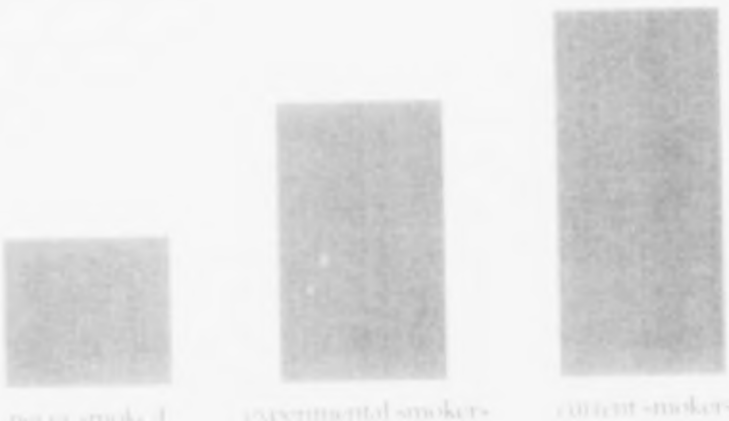
Do rural smoking rates differ from rates in Whitehorse?

In contrast to younger grades where rural students were more likely to smoke than students in Whitehorse, there are no differences by Grades 11-12. Just under 50% of rural and Whitehorse students are experimental smokers, and 18% are current smokers.

How does smoking among males and females compare?

Do smokers associate with other smokers?

Percentage of students who have a close friendship with at least one smoker



Their friends are smoking so they just keep smoking and it's something to do.

Grade 11 student

Do rural smoking rates differ from rates in Whitehorse?

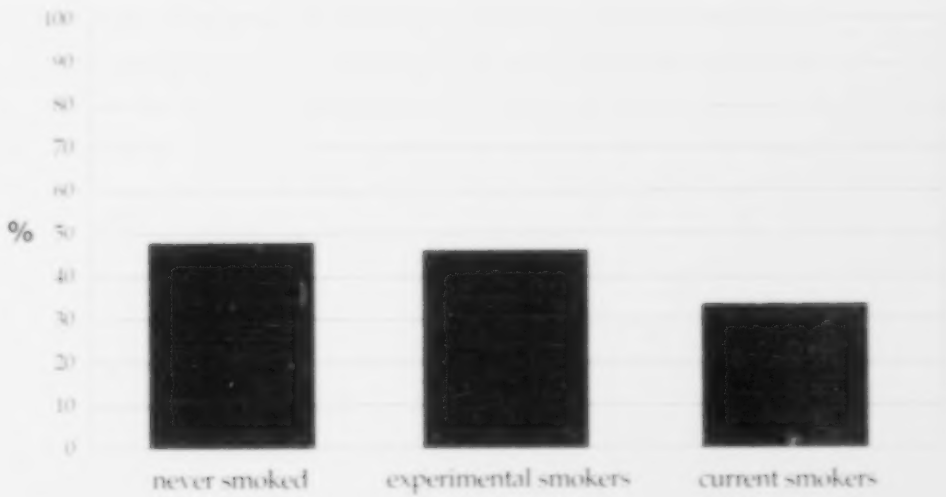
Do smokers differ from non-smokers in how they spend their non-school hours?

The finding that smokers are less likely to be physically active continues in Grades 11-12. About one out of two non-smokers and experimental smokers are physically active four or more times per week compared to one out of three current smokers.

As in previous grades, the majority of Grade 11-12 students participate in other positive activities with non-smokers having higher participation rates than either experimental or current smokers. Seventy-four per cent (74%) of non-smokers participate in clubs, groups and other recreational activities one to three times per week compared to 57% of experimental smokers and 61% of current smokers.

Reading for fun is also more common among non-smokers than smokers. About 60% of non-smokers read for pleasure versus 52% of experimental smokers and 45% of current smokers.

Graph 5.2 – **Percentage of Grade 11-12 students who are physically active**



In contrast to previous years, TV watching is very similar among the three groups of Grade 11-12 students. Roughly 26% of non-smokers, 26% of experimental smokers, and 32% of current smokers watch three or more hours of TV per day.

Are there differences in how smokers and non-smokers feel about themselves?

My friend, I think she smokes because it gives her something to do with her hands and then she won't eat. I think she uses it as a diet aid.

Grade 11 student

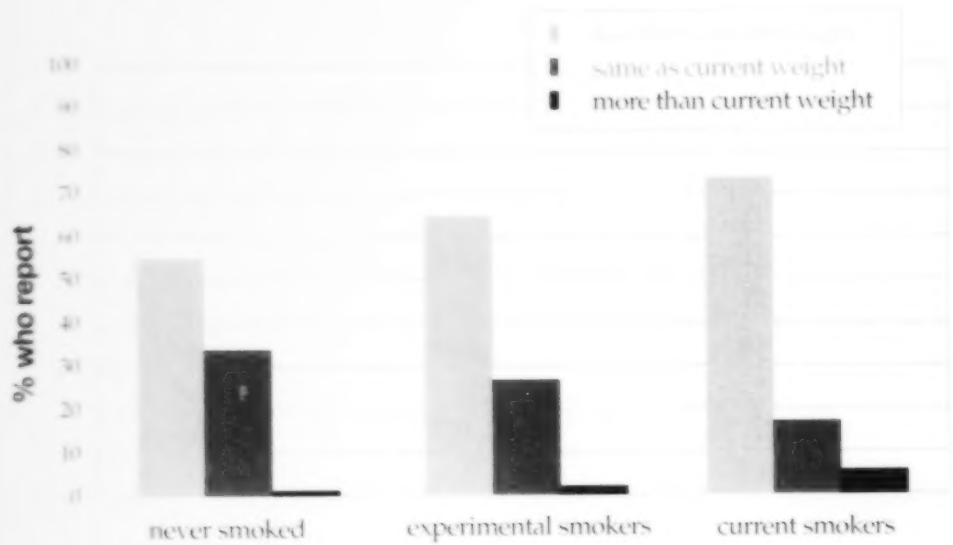
The majority of senior high school students are satisfied with the way they are. Again, however, we see a difference between smokers and non-smokers. Whereas 82% of non-smokers endorse the statement "I like the way I am," 71% of experimental smokers and 70% of current smokers are satisfied with the way they are.

There are no differences in how smokers and non-smokers evaluate the "way they look." Overall, 62% of Grades 11-12 students are satisfied with the way they look.

Dissatisfaction with weight is even more prevalent in Grades 11-12 than it was in earlier grades. Overall only one-third (35%) of students are satisfied with their current weight. Thirty-nine percent of non-smokers, 33% of experimental smokers, and 32% of current smokers are satisfied with their weight.

The gender differences in weight satisfaction are most pronounced at this grade level. The majority of females surveyed were dissatisfied with their weight and reported a desire to weigh less. This was particularly true among smokers. Fully 74% of smokers want to lose weight versus 66% of experimental smokers and 55% of those who have never smoked.

Graph 5.3 – **Desired weight of Grade 11-12 females by smoking behaviour**



Smoking makes you not as hungry.

Grade 12 student

Are there differences in how smokers and non-smokers feel about themselves?

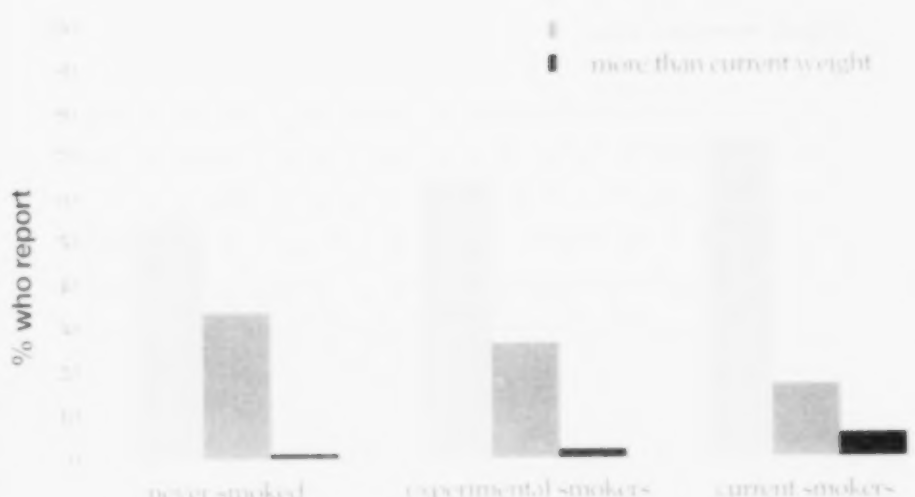
My friend, I think she smokes because it gives her something to do with her hands and then she won't eat. I think she uses it as a diet aid.

Grade 11 student

Smoking makes you not as hungry.

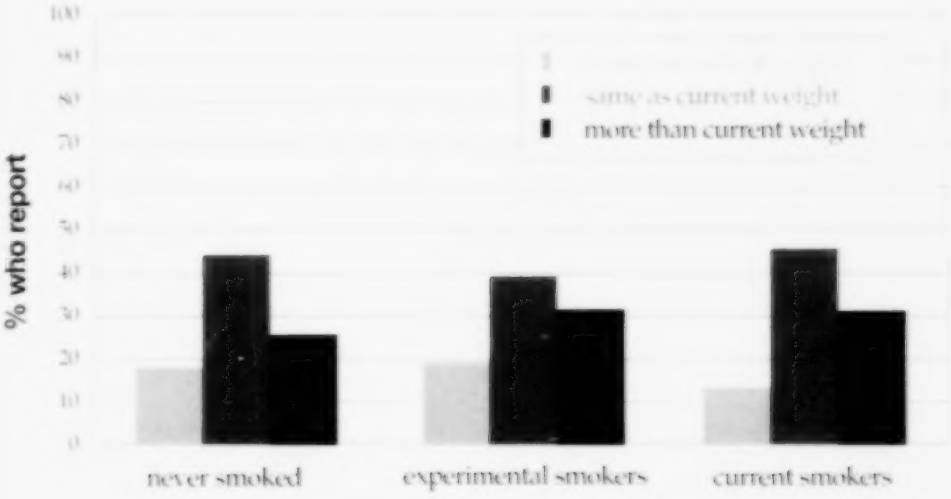
Grade 12 student

Desired weight of Grade 11-12 females by smoking behaviour



In comparison, males were more satisfied with their weight than females, and those who were dissatisfied were more likely to want to weigh more, not less. Overall, differences in weight satisfaction were less pronounced among male smokers and non-smokers than they were among female smokers and non-smokers.

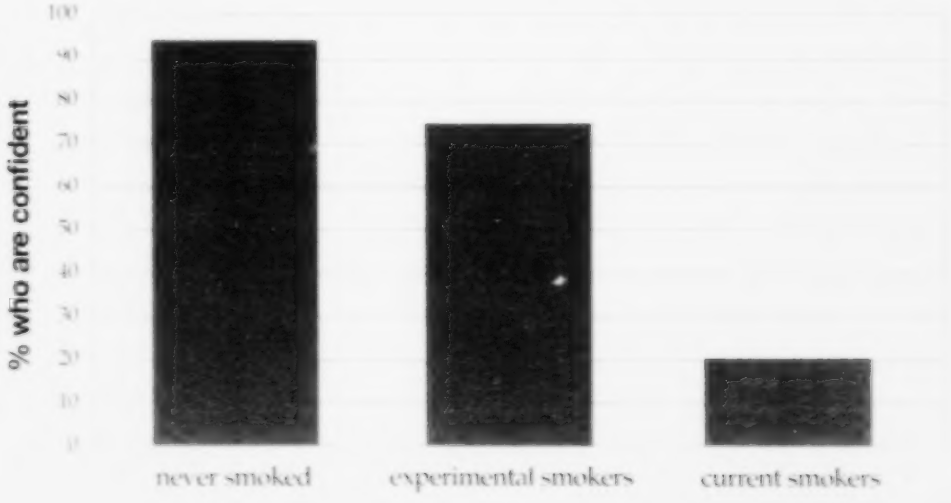
Graph 5.4 – **Desired weight of Grade 11-12 males by smoking behaviour**



What does the future hold?

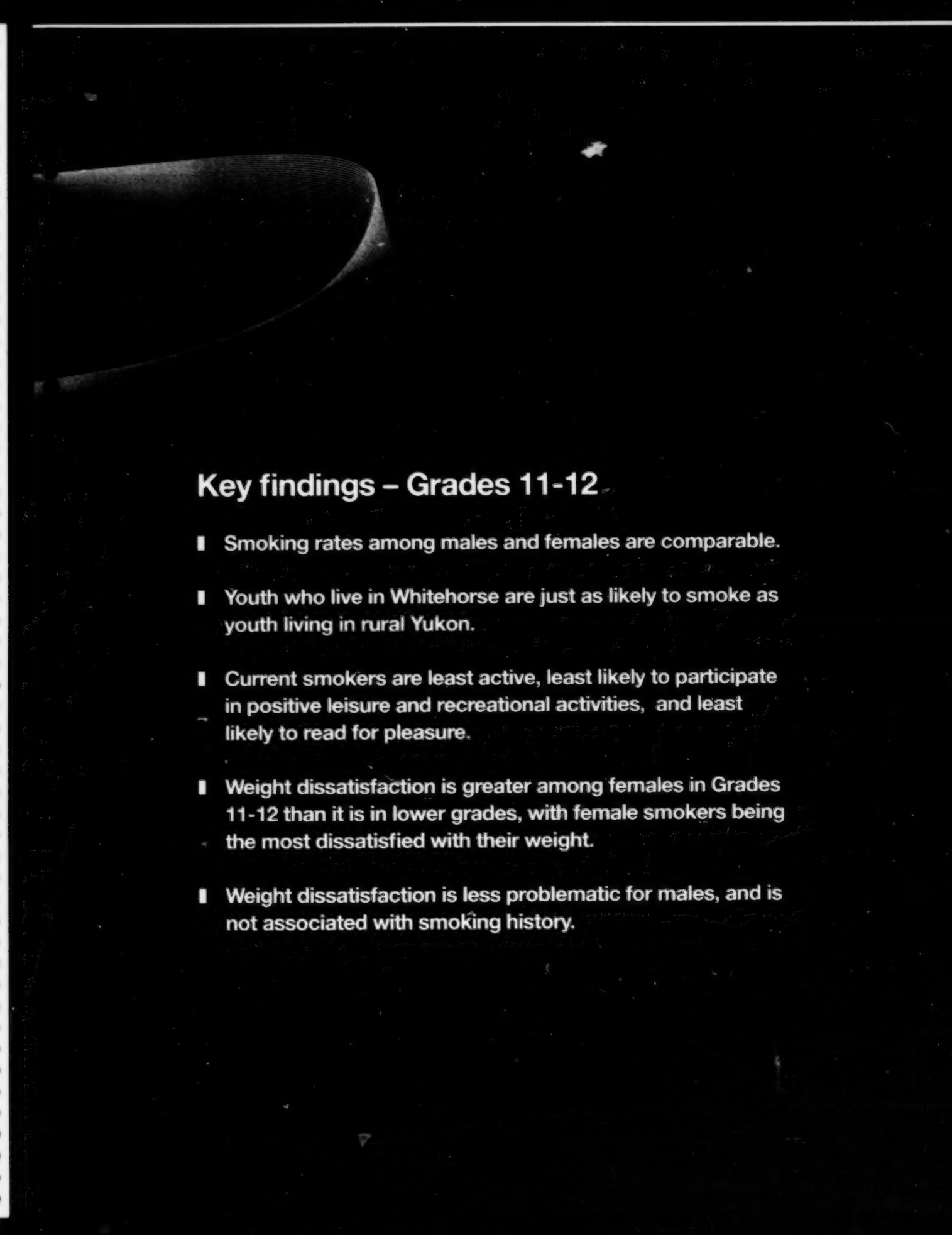
When asked whether they thought they would be smoking in one year's time, almost all of the non-smokers are confident they will remain smoke-free. In contrast, relatively few current smokers were confident that they would become smoke-fee in one year's time.

Graph 5.5 – **Confidence of being smoke-free in one year's time**



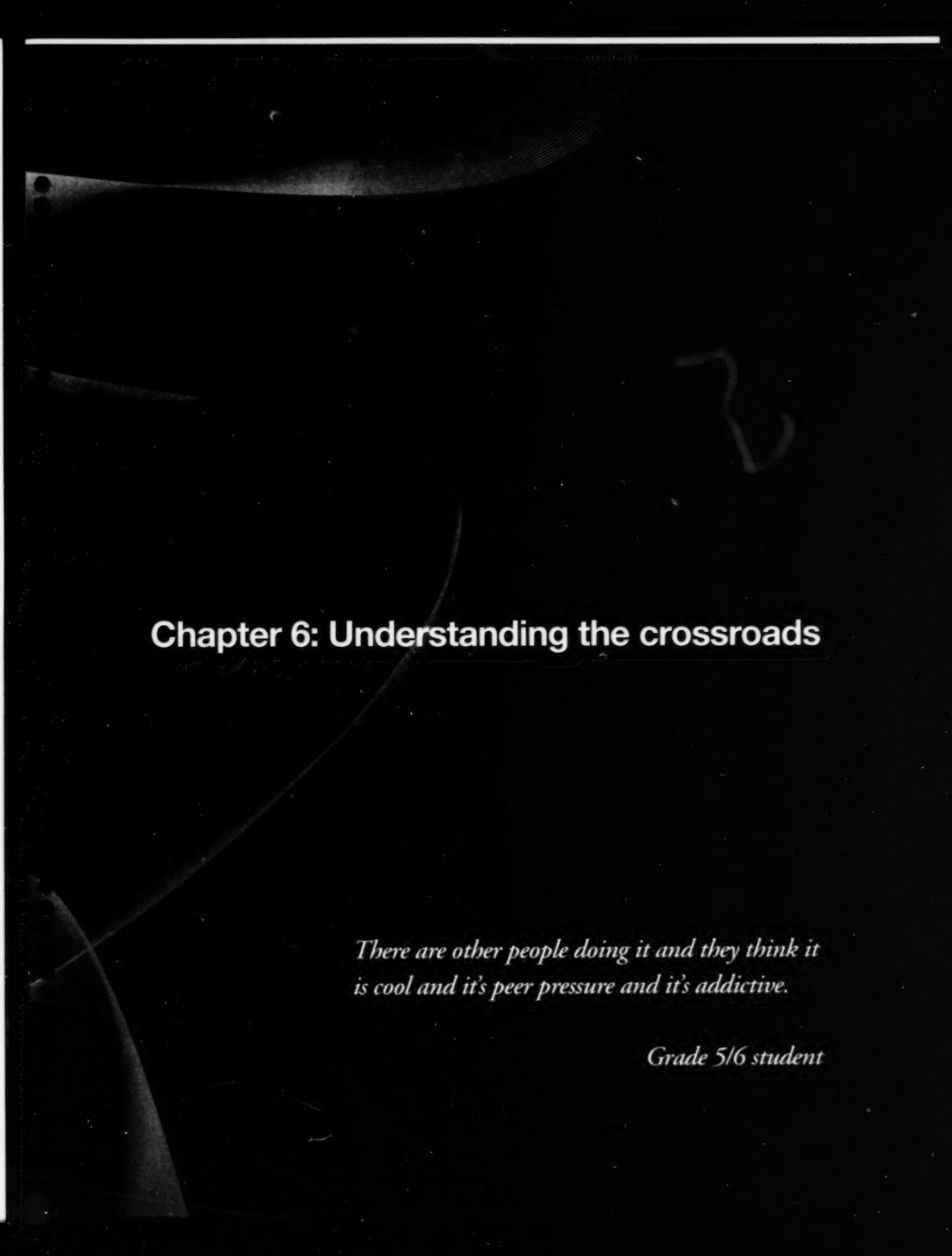
Most of the people I talk to my age that smoke wish they didn't...They just do it because they are addicted to it. They want to quit but they can't.

Grade 11 student



Key findings – Grades 11-12

- Smoking rates among males and females are comparable.
- Youth who live in Whitehorse are just as likely to smoke as youth living in rural Yukon.
- Current smokers are least active, least likely to participate in positive leisure and recreational activities, and least likely to read for pleasure.
- Weight dissatisfaction is greater among females in Grades 11-12 than it is in lower grades, with female smokers being the most dissatisfied with their weight.
- Weight dissatisfaction is less problematic for males, and is not associated with smoking history.



Chapter 6: Understanding the crossroads

There are other people doing it and they think it is cool and it's peer pressure and it's addictive.

Grade 5/6 student

We believe that students in Grades 8, 9 and 10 are at a crossroads in terms of smoking. This appears to be the age at which a significant number of students make the transition from non-smoker to experimental smoker, and others go from being experimental smokers to current smokers.

An important question to ask is what factors influence some young people to move along the path of smoking when others do not. In this section we will look more closely at factors which might influence a young person's decision to remain a non-smoker, experiment with tobacco, or begin to smoke cigarettes on a more regular basis.

We assume that students in a given smoking category will be exposed to similar influences or share certain characteristics that affect their decision-making when it comes to smoking. For this reason, we will be looking at the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of students across all ages rather than looking at each grade grouping separately.

In addition to looking at responses to questions on the written survey, we will also draw upon the experiences, insights, and opinions that students shared with us in the group discussions.

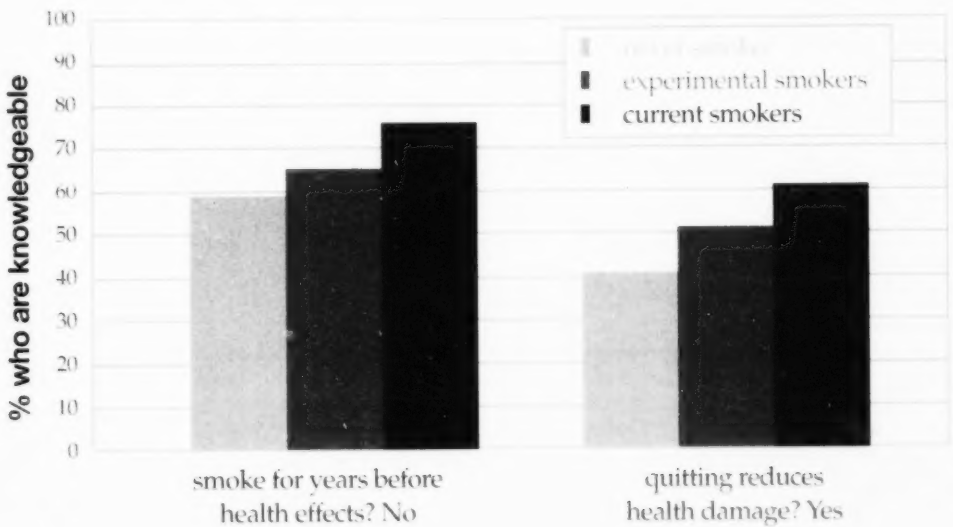
Are youth knowledgeable about the health effects of smoking?

Youth in all smoking categories are very knowledgeable about the health effects of smoking on both smokers and non-smokers, and the health benefits of quitting.

You know as you are smoking...it's killing you and wrecking everything, but you just look past it.

Grade 11/12 student

Graph 6.1 – **Youth's knowledge of the health effects of smoking and quitting**



Most impressive is that 85% of non-smokers, 91% of experimental smokers and 94% of current smokers are aware of the dangers of second-hand smoke.

If you are smoking in front of your child, they can get asthma.

Grade 5 student

Knowing the health consequences of second-hand smoke may inform youth's views on smoking in public places or work settings. Although many youth view smoking as a personal decision, there is significant support for creating smoke-free places.

I don't think there should be smoking allowed in any restaurant or bar. It's like hiring people into a workforce where there's health dangers. Any other health risk and the government would immediately go regulate that. Grade 11 student

Because if you want to smoke, I think that's your personal right. If that's what you want to do. But the fact that you smoke shouldn't hazard the health of others and it does…so you shouldn't be able to smoke in public places because it's a problem for others. Grade 11 student

Do youth see any benefits to smoking?

Current smokers, in particular, have strong beliefs in the positive consequences of smoking. Current smokers are most likely to believe that smoking can alleviate boredom and help people relax.

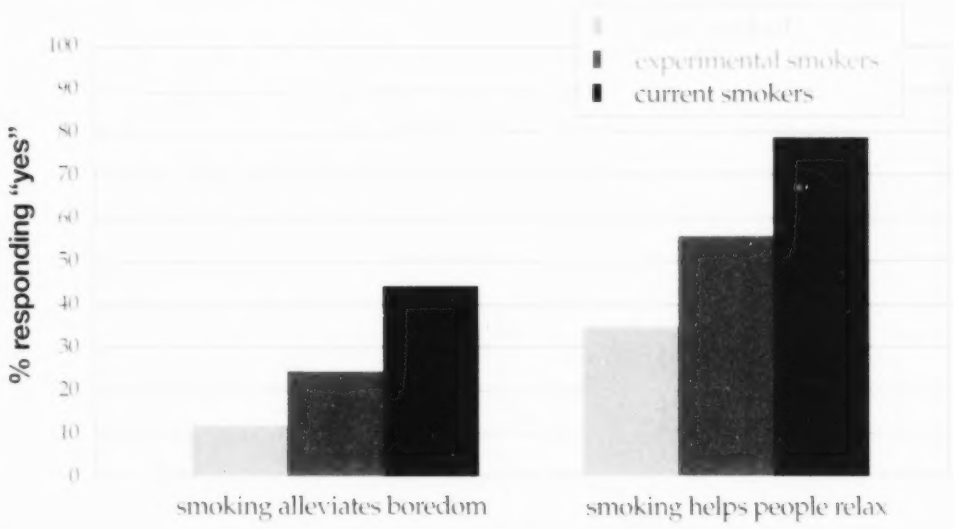
It's like a comfort food. People eat food when they're stressed out to make themselves feel better. People smoke. It's a comfort thing.

Grade 12 student

Lots of people do it when they're bored or when they're nervous or when they're stressed out about something.

Grade 11/12 student

Graph 6.2 – **Smoking as a means of controlling emotions**



Group discussion suggests that younger youth tend to attribute smoking to role modeling and a desire to be cool whereas older youth are very likely to see cigarettes as helpful in controlling negative moods. At the same time, older youth seem to appreciate that the reasons people smoke are multiple and complicated. The following exchange between Grade 10 students illustrates this deeper understanding.

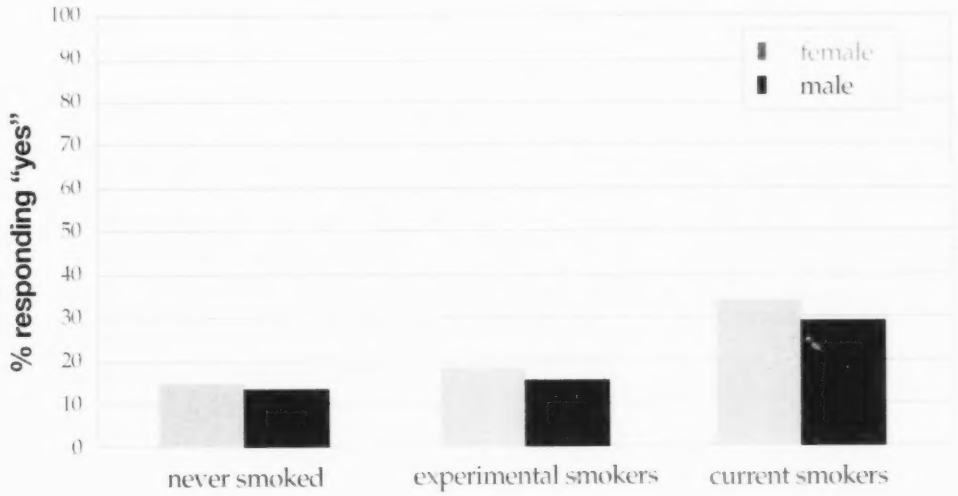
Student 1: *It calms some people down.*
Student 2: *That's when they become addicted, though.*
Student 3: *Doesn't it cause more stress because you're stressing because you need a cigarette?*
Student 1: *...then after you smoke you feel better.*
Student 3: *But your stress is caused by the cigarette*
Student 2: *So it causes and solves stress.*

A Grade 11 student offers insight into the complex relationship between smoking and mood based on observing his own smoking behaviour.

If you're doing something that's really riveting for you, then you don't think about having a cigarette. But if you're bored out of your mind, then you're going to want more cigarettes. So, it depends on how occupied you are. With me, anyway. I find, if I'm really into something, then I won't have a cigarette for four hours at a time.

Current smokers are also more likely than either experimental smokers or non-smokers to believe that smoking helps people control their weight. Although gender differences were seen in relation to satisfaction with body image and weight, males and females were equally likely to believe that smoking helps manage weight.

Graph 6.3 – **Smoking as a means of controlling weight**



There are a lot of girls that think it makes them thin.

Grade 12 student

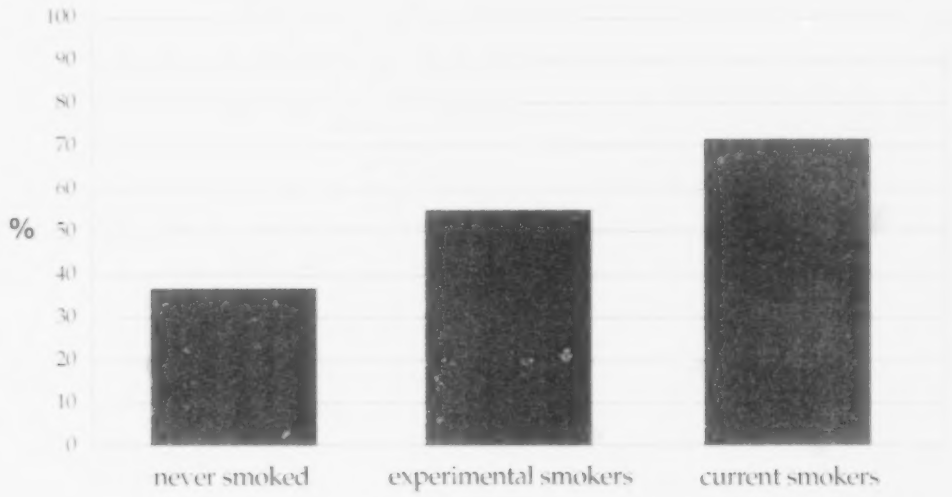
Do youth appreciate that nicotine is addictive?

There is no question that the addictive properties of nicotine are understood by youth. About 89% of non-smokers, 92% of experimental smokers, and 93% of current smokers identify smoking as addictive. At the same time, one in four youth believe that "smokers can quit any time they want." 23% of non-smokers, 27% of experimental smokers, and 27% of current smokers endorse that statement.

How does the home and social environment influence smoking?

There appears to be a strong link between parental smoking and a youth's decision to smoke. Youth who live in homes where one or both parents smoke are more likely to experiment with smoking and become current smokers. And in discussion groups, youth of all ages commented on the influence of parents who smoke.

Graph 6.4 – **Percentage of youth who have at least one parent who smokes**



They want to start smoking because their family does it.

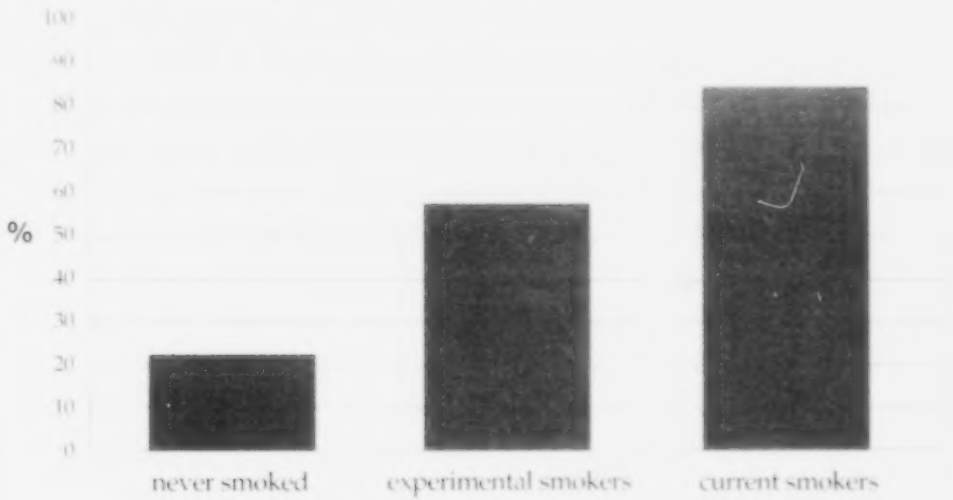
Grade 6 student

Well, I started because my parents do.

Grade 11/12 student

The same pattern of results is seen when we look at peer relationships. Youth who smoke are more likely to have at least one friend who is also a smoker.

Graph 6.5 – **Percentage of youth who have at least one friend who smokes**



To stay with the group.

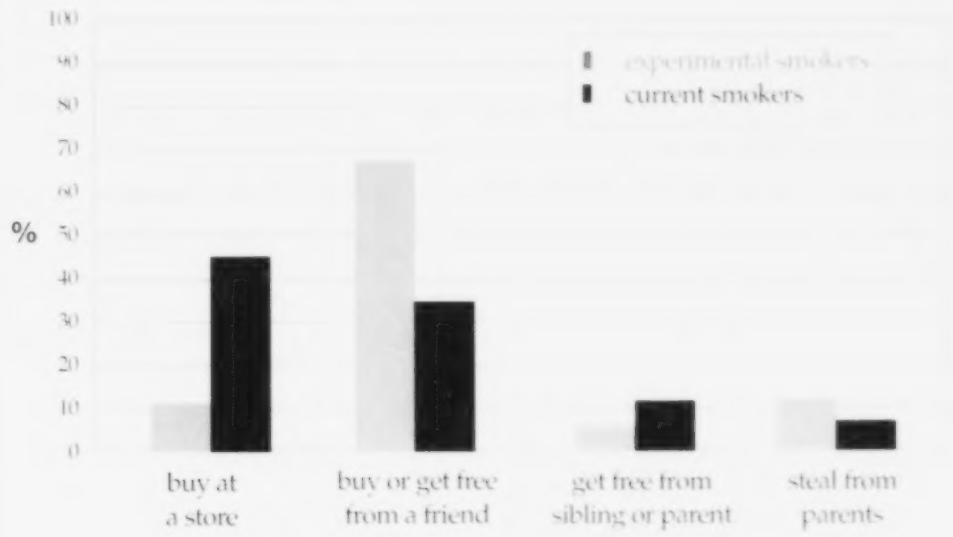
Grade 10 student on why some youth smoke

Having family and close friends who smoke may both normalize smoking behaviour and provide opportunity for youth to smoke. Being around smokers, whether at home or among peers, may increase access to cigarettes, particularly among youth who are experimenting with smoking.

How do youth obtain cigarettes?

Experimental smokers are most likely to gain access to cigarettes through their friends, but will also steal cigarettes from their parents. Although friends continue to be a source of cigarettes, current smokers make the transition to purchasing cigarettes.

Graph 6.6 – **How youth obtain cigarettes**



Smoking is influenced mostly by parents. Most kids can get cigarettes from parents.

Grade 10 student

Social influences on youth's decisions about smoking are not limited to their immediate social environment. In discussion groups, youth of all ages were quick to point out the role of the entertainment and tobacco industries in promoting smoking generally and among youth in particular.

In TV shows and all over real life, you see people smoking and that it's cool. Grade 5 student

The smoking companies do some things that make kids think, "Oh, this is a good idea. Why don't we do this?" Grade 7 student

For like teens and stuff, they use sex and stuff to try and sell them. Grade 11 student

Targetting youth – they (the tobacco companies) try to go for the young kids. Grade 11 student

Is smoking cool?

Very few young people agree with the statement that "smoking is cool." Less than 10% of current smokers believe smoking is cool, and the percentage is even less among non-smokers and experimental smokers (about 1% and 3%, respectively).

In apparent contrast to the survey results, many students in the group discussion talked about "being cool" or wanting to belong.

A lot of people start thinking it's cool and they'll be all popular. A lot of people have role models and their role models smoke and they try to be like their role models. I know people that push them to smoke, say "You should try this, it's so fun. It's so cool." Grade 6 student

Because they just want to test limits and if they are different then they can be, like, I'm cooler than you because I do it and you don't. Grade 7 student

Some people think it's cool and they make them look more mature and more popular and all that, but it's not really. Grade 6 student

Some people have friends or family who smoke and you want to try smoking to see what it's like because if they do it, it must be cool. Grade 6 student

It may be that youth do not view the act of smoking as cool, but rather view people who smoke as cool. To the extent that youth model themselves after people who they perceive as cool, we might expect youth to try smoking if their role models are smokers.

But you realize that that person [a smoker] is almost..I don't want to say cool, but you look at them differently, like they are…experienced or mature or whatever. Grade12 student

I think it's probably that it's not necessarily cool but you see people smoking who maybe you look up to or people who are popular. Grade 11 student

Key findings – Knowledge, attitude and influences on smoking

- Youth are well aware of the health consequences of smoking to themselves and others, the addictive properties of nicotine and the benefits of quitting.
- Youth appreciate that factors influencing the decision to experiment with or take up smoking are many, and believe these influences include role modeling, alleviation of stress or boredom, and possibly a desire to be "cool."
- Parents and friends who smoke may act as role models and may make it easier for youth to obtain access to cigarettes.

Chapter 7: Making sense and moving forward

Facilitator: Is it easy to ask people around you not to smoke?
Grade 7 student: If you are related to them, no.

Taken together, the survey results and group discussions provide a starting point to better understand the factors that influence the decisions and behaviour of Yukon youth when it comes to smoking. These findings challenge educators, health care providers, public health officials, youth workers and decision makers within and outside of government to find effective ways to help youth resist the temptation to take up smoking and to support young smokers who want to break the habit. In the discussion that follows, we will highlight the main findings and propose actions to support smoke-free living among Yukon youth.

Many youth experiment with tobacco, with youth in rural Yukon beginning at a much earlier age than youth living in Whitehorse.

Although 60% of youth are non-smokers, many are experimenting with tobacco and some of these experimenters will go on to become regular smokers. Rural youth are experimenting with smoking and becoming smokers at an earlier age than are youth living in Whitehorse. One in four Grade 5-7 students living in rural Yukon is experimenting with tobacco. At the same time, youth who are tobacco-free when they reach Grades 11-12 are very confident that they will continue to be smoke-free. These findings underscore the importance of prevention.

Mostly young kids start smoking because they look up to the older kids.

Grade 9 student

School-based programs to help youth build the skills and confidence to resist smoking should begin in early elementary school, particularly in rural Yukon communities. These programs should continue to provide information on health issues and support critical thinking about the tobacco and entertainment industries. But prevention is not limited to school programming. Health care providers and youth workers are encouraged to routinely ask young people about whether they are experimenting with smoking, and to provide both information and encouragement to resist this temptation. There is also a role for parents that we will describe below.

In general, youth who smoke are less physically active, engage in fewer positive leisure activities, watch more TV, are less likely to read for pleasure and have lower self-esteem than are non-smokers.

Survey data can reveal important relationships between smoking and a variety of factors that may influence the decision to smoke. Survey data cannot, however, tell us what causes what. In group discussions, students repeatedly spoke of the use of tobacco to alleviate boredom. Their focus on boredom is consistent with the finding that youth who smoke tend to be less engaged in physical and other positive leisure activities, and less likely to read for pleasure than other youth. And youth may watch TV to alleviate boredom in the absence of other options. Creating opportunities to engage youth's energy, intelligence and creativity – whether in groups or as individuals – may provide youth with both the motivation and the means to combat boredom in healthy ways and, at the same time, help build a sense of personal competence and confidence.

Fostering a love of reading at an early age may provide a young person with one of the most accessible means of combating boredom, one that is both self-directed and independent of the presence or participation of others.

Although physical activity levels are lowest among smokers, we must point out that upwards of half of **all** students, independent of smoking status, are not physically active. Promoting active living and creating youth-friendly accessible recreational and athletic spaces and programs will benefit all youth, including those who take up smoking.

Youth are aware of and influenced by the many ways in which smoking is normalized, if not promoted, in their daily lives.

They (tobacco companies) are counting on youths to pick up smoking

Grade 9 student

Youth who smoke are more likely to have parents and close friends who smoke. They spoke repeatedly of the influence of role models – their parents, older students, mentors, and even celebrities – on their own smoking behaviour. By taking steps to quit, parents and other adult role models who smoke can send a powerful message to their children about the value of smoke-free living. It may also be beneficial to help youth decode and challenge the messages of the entertainment and tobacco industries which condone, if not promote, smoking.

Facilitator: How do you feel when you've walked into a building when there are a bunch of people smoking outside the door?

Ambushed.

Grade 5 student

Many youth pointed out that allowing smoking in public spaces not only exposes non-smokers to the effects of second-hand smoke but also normalizes smoking. In the group discussions, youth expressed considerable support for creating smoke-free public spaces, homes, schools and workplaces.

It's a bad influence on kids (when they see people smoking in restaurants.) Grade 10 Student

There shouldn't be a smoking pit because all of the younger kids see them and it influences them. Grade 8 student

All parents, whether they are smokers or not, should consider making their homes and cars smoke-free. Schools and youth-serving organizations that allow smoking in certain areas (e.g., smoking pits) may want to work with youth to reclaim these spaces and create smoke-free environments.

About one in five in the senior grades are regular smokers.

Youth know about the health effects of smoking on themselves and others, and the benefits of quitting. They understand that nicotine is addictive, and most students appreciate that quitting is not easy. Only 20% of current smokers believe that they will be free of tobacco in one year's time.

In addition to the physiological addiction, smoking serves an important role for some youth in controlling emotions. Many youth use smoking to manage boredom, stress and anxiety.

...because they might be under a lot of stress so all of their friends are saying "Well, this is a great stress reliever, try it out." They also might feel under peer pressure.

Grade 11 student

Cessation programs geared to youth should be made available to those smokers who want to quit and should include opportunities to build skills in stress and mood management. Ideally these programs should be easily accessible, for example, by locating them in school or youth organizations that promote smoke-free living in a comprehensive way. These efforts should not just be restricted to youth who are regular smokers. Many experimental smokers are not at all confident that they will be smoke-free in one year's time. And some youth who experiment with tobacco may not understand the risk of becoming a regular smoker in the future. It may be important, therefore, to not only include experimental smokers in cessation programs but to specifically encourage them to take part. Programs that enable youth to resist the temptation to move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking may be just as important as cessation programming for regular smokers in reducing smoking among youth.

Dissatisfaction with weight is associated with smoking among female, but not male, students.

Many more females than males, are dissatisfied with their weight and this dissatisfaction increases with age. Most females who are dissatisfied want to weigh less. Among females, the smokers are the most dissatisfied. This pattern of findings is not seen with males. Smoking cessation programs may need to address gender-specific issues, including gender stereotypes, weight preoccupation and the cultural ideal of "thinness." Because weight dissatisfaction among all females is so common, consideration should be given to addressing these issues in forums where all females, not just smokers, can benefit.

Parting words...

This report is not the final word on youth smoking in Yukon but rather a beginning. We hope that the findings we have reported will stimulate both discussion and action among concerned youth and adults. Effective strategies to reduce smoking among Yukon youth need to be informed first and foremost by the experiences, observations and expectations of youth themselves. Just as the factors that lead youth to take up smoking are many and complex, so too are the solutions. No single act or program will "take care of the problem" but by working together on many fronts, progress can be made towards a smoke-free life for all Yukon youth. Some of the recommendations we have made in this report are activities that specifically target tobacco use and reduction. Equally important, however, is creating opportunities and environments in which youth can develop competence, confidence and critical thinking skills.

Fostering a love of reading at an early age may provide a young person with one of the most accessible means of cultivating boredom; one that is both self-directed and independent of the presence or participation of others.

Although physical activity levels are lowest among smokers, we must point out that upwards of half of **all** students, independent of smoking status, are not physically active. Promoting active living and creating youth-friendly accessible recreational and athletic spaces and programs will benefit all youth, including those who take up smoking.

Youth are aware of and influenced by the many ways in which smoking is normalized, if not promoted, in their daily lives.

They (tobacco companies) are counting on youths to pick up smoking

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...because they might be under a lot of stress so all of their friends are saying "Well, this is a great stress reliever, try it out." They also might feel under peer pressure.

Grade 11 student

Cessation programs geared to youth should be made available to those smokers who want to quit and should include opportunities to build skills in stress and mood management. Ideally these programs should be easily accessible, for example by locating them in school or youth organizations that promote smoke-free living in a comprehensive way. These efforts should not just be restricted to youth who are regular smokers. Many experimental smokers are not at all confident that they will be smoke-free in one year's time. And some youth who experiment with tobacco may not understand the risk of becoming a regular smoker in the future. It may be important, therefore, to not only include experimental smokers in cessation programs but to specifically encourage them to take part. Programs that enable youth to resist the temptation to move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking may be just as important as cessation programming for regular smokers in reducing smoking among youth.

Dissatisfaction with weight is associated with smoking among female, but not male, students.

Many more females than males, are dissatisfied with their weight and this dissatisfaction increases with age. Most females who are dissatisfied want to weigh less. Among females, the smokers are the most dissatisfied. This pattern of findings is not seen with males. Smoking cessation programs may need to address gender-specific issues, including gender stereotypes, weight preoccupation and the cultural ideal of "thinness." Because weight dissatisfaction among all females is so common, consideration should be given to addressing these issues in forums where all females, not just smokers, can benefit.

Parting words...

This report is not the final word on youth smoking in Yukon but rather a beginning. We hope that the findings we have reported will stimulate both discussion and action among concerned youth and adults. Effective strategies to reduce smoking among Yukon youth need to be informed first and foremost by the experiences, observations and expectations of youth themselves. Just as the factors that lead youth to take up smoking are many and complex, so too are the solutions. No single act or program will "take care of the problem" but by working together on many fronts, progress can be made towards a smoke-free life for all Yukon youth. Some of the recommendations we have made in this report are activities that specifically target tobacco use and reduction. Equally important, however, is creating opportunities and environments in which youth can develop competence, confidence and critical thinking skills.

We'd like to give the last words to youth themselves who offer the following suggestions on how we can work to make a difference.

Get the store to stop selling cigarettes. Grade 7-9 student

Raise the prices really high. Grade 7-9 student

I would like smoking to be banned from public places. Grade 10 student

Have activities so people won't be bored. Grade 7-9 student

If you have a friend who's started to smoke, just tell him it's not good. Grade 7- 9 student

Take it out of the movies. If you watch a lot of movies, there is somebody always smoking. Grade 5-7 student

Video games and songs (are a good way to get the word out about the health effects of smoking.) Grade 7 student

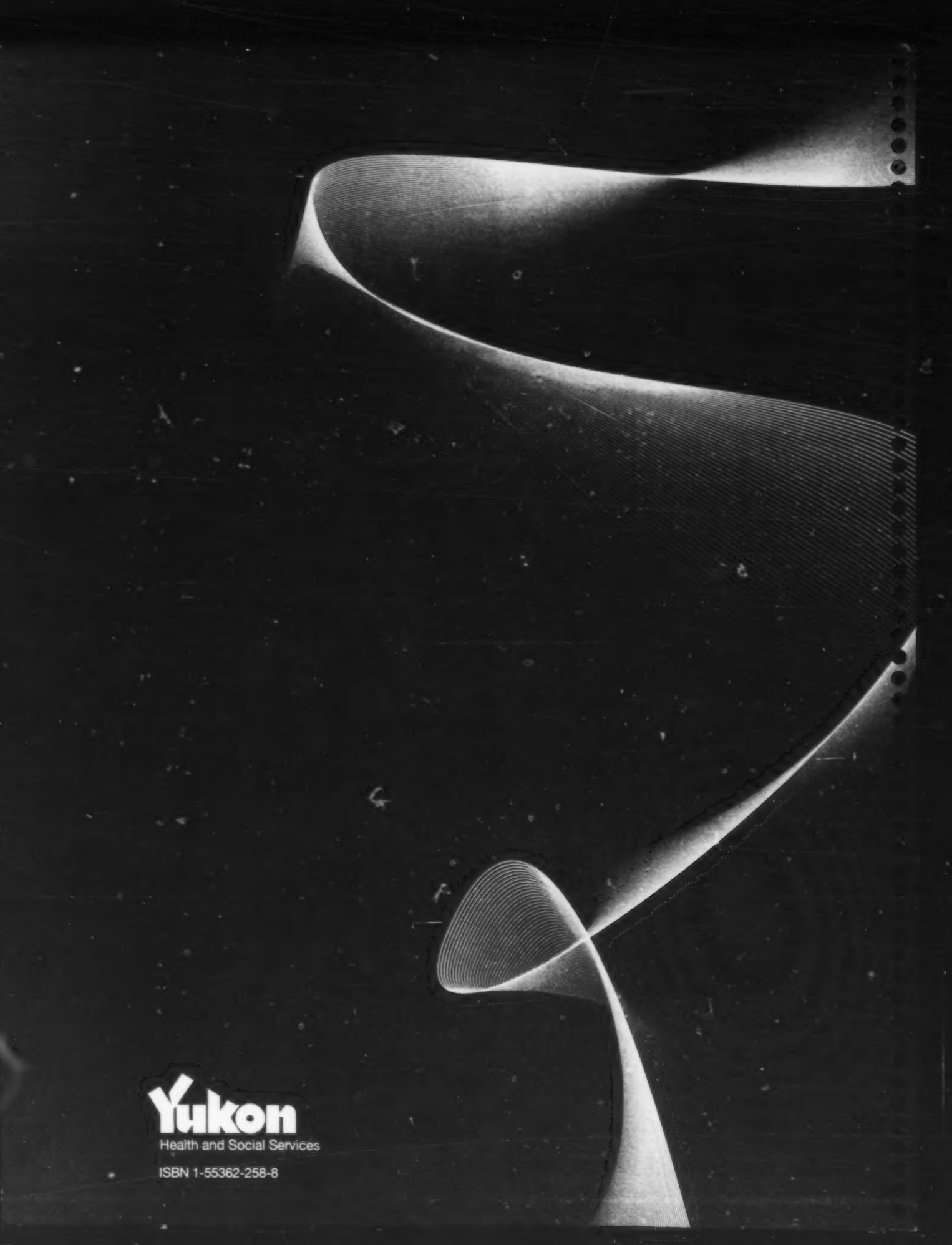
I think the idea about kids telling kids is a good idea. Grade 5-7 student

There shouldn't be a smoking pit. Grade 5-8 student

I think maybe they should raise the price of cigarettes. Grade 10 student

You tend to smoke more if you drink alcohol. That's what I've noticed. Grade 12 student

If they do put a ban it might help further change the mentality on smoking and help more people quit or just not start in the first place. Grade 11 student



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ISBN 1-55362-258-8